



THE GRAMMAR OF THE KABARDIAN LANGUAGE

by John Colarusso

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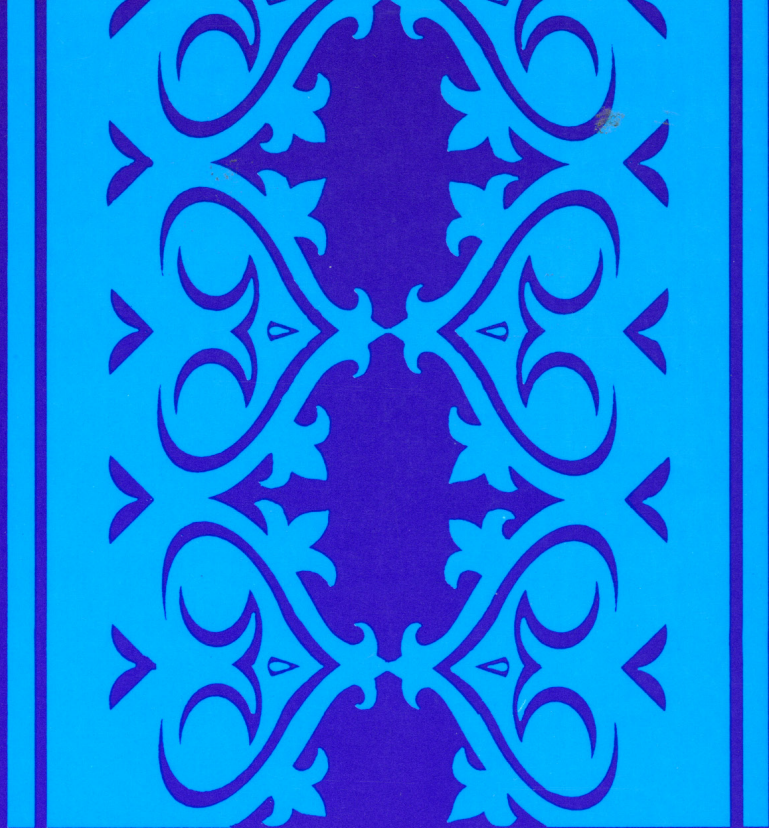
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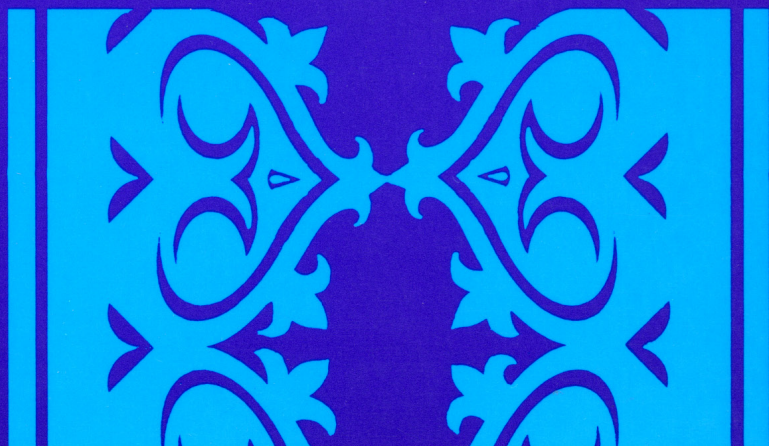
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Kabardian Language*

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John Colarusso

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Preface

The present work is the first full grammar of Kabardian to appear in any language other than Russian. This language of the Russian Federation, a member of the Northwest Caucasian language family, has been of considerable interest to theoretical linguists because of the controversy surrounding the status of its vowels. The eminent Dutch linguist and Caucasologist, Aert H. Kuipers, brought this language into modern linguistic debate by arguing that it had no underlying vowels (Kuipers 1960). The debate was joined by two of the most influential theorists in phonology, with Morris Halle opposing Kuipers (Halle 1970) and Stephen Anderson supporting Kuipers' position, but recasting it in a modern syllabic form (Anderson 1978). The present volume also takes up this issue.

The vowels, however, are only the beginning of the typological treasures to be found within Kabardian. There are forty-eight consonants in most dialects, and while this is a minimum for Northwest Caucasian consonantal inventories, it is nevertheless a huge number by ordinary standards. Unusual contrasts and complex clusters abound. The phonological rules of the language are complex and highly ordered. The result is that many Kabardian surface forms appear far removed from their underlying sources. Alternative analyses, however, simply do not describe the language efficiently or accurately.

The morphology of the language is highly complex, especially in the case of the verb. The verb can inflect for every noun in the sentence as well as for a range of subtle geometrical, aspectual, temporal, and pragmatical features. The complex verbal use of several distinct temporal and adverbial positions, as well as the intermixing of personal indices with geometrical and pragmatical ones, strongly suggests that multiple layers of morphology and distinct morphological processes are at work. Such complexity is not restricted to the verb, but appears in word formation in general. As with its sister languages, Kabardian constructs the vast majority of its vocabulary from a relatively small number of basic roots. This language not only has a wealth of word formation processes, but also provides an opportunity to see a semantic component working virtually at the surface, creating meanings from smaller components.

Finally, in its syntax Kabardian is highly unusual. It is ergative (the subject of an intransitive and the direct object of a transitive bearing the same case) and shows rich anti-passive and passive formation. Further, the language seems to have right-hand complementisers, so that movement rules, such as clefting, and question formation, tend to show (unbounded) rightward movement. Embedding processes show striking parallels with more familiar languages such as English, but, because of right-hand complementiser placement, also show exotic processes of raising or “flattening out” of structure.

The present grammar is by no means exhaustive, but it does aspire to cover all features of interest in the language. I have avoided couching the grammar in terms that reflect some of the more recent schools of linguistic theory. To do so would have tied the grammar's usefulness to the lifetime of that particular school of thought or to a developmental stage of a particular paradigm, and would have provided an overburden of theoretical machinery that might have made Kabardian inaccessible to some readers. This grammar is intended to be descriptive and to that end I have used theory only to the extent that it provides a clearer access to the phenomena of the language.

The grammar, therefore, has a distinct post-taxonomic, generative transformational orientation. It is dense. I have organised the data so as to exhibit certain interpretations of the grammar, and have refrained from holding forth about these interpretations with little substantiating fact, as is so often done in linguistics. I have also not shied away from a degree of what might appear to be repetition. The grammar is an abstract organism with its various components or organs functioning synergistically to meet certain ends. Thus, the reader will find certain matters of verbal morphology appearing again in syntax, because the morphology and syntax of the language are interdependent, as are the phonology and morphology.

A list of abbreviations used throughout the book is to be found in Appendix B.

I have demanded much of the reader. Readers will have to be diligent and work through the Kabardian examples, but they will then come away from this work with an intimate knowledge of this remarkable language.

Acknowledgements

In the following grammatical sketch I have relied heavily upon the reference grammars by Kardanov (1957) and Abitov et al. (1957), the dictionaries by Kardanov and Bichoev (1955) and Kardanov et al. (1957), and the theoretical study by Kuipers (1960). All these works deal with the literary dialect. I have supplemented

them with material provided by native speakers, Ms. Majdalin Hilmi of Amman, Jordan, whose Kabardian appears to be close to the literary dialect, and Mr. Hisa Torkacho of Hillside, New Jersey, who was born in the Caucasus in a village containing displaced Circassians from the entire homeland region and who, as a result, is fluent in all the Circassian dialects and languages. I have also drawn from texts in Hadaghat'la (1968–71). I owe a debt of gratitude to my old friend, Rashid Dahabsu, a speaker of Bzhedukh West Circassian, for first teaching me this marvelous language. Photographs of these Circassians follow this preface.

I wish to thank my friend and colleague, B. George Hewitt, of the London School of Oriental and African Studies, without whose prompting and criticism this grammar would never have come into being. George was the editor for a volume, *Northwest Caucasian Languages* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1989), for which I prepared a shorter grammatical sketch of Kabardian. The present volume, more than twice the length of the sketch, has grown out of that work and benefits directly from much of his guidance. Nevertheless, I am solely responsible for the contents of this monograph, its biases and interpretations, many of which George would not support.

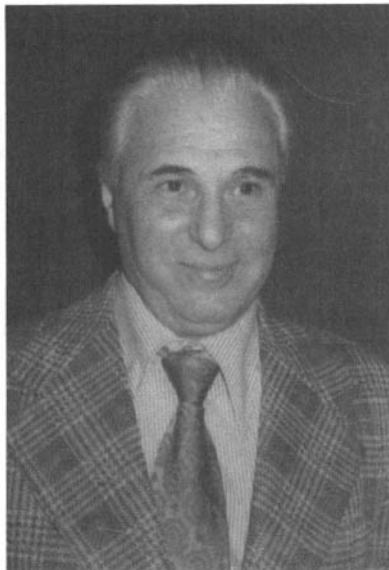
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Circassian Colleagues



Majdalin Hilmi (Habjoqua)



Hisa Torkacho (T'harquakho)



Rashid Dahabsu (T'haghapsaw)



Asker Hadaghat'la

Maps



CAUCASIAN PEOPLES AND DISTRICTS, END OF THE 18th CENTURY

THE CAUCASUS, REPUBLICS, AND (AUTONOMOUS) SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST REPUBLICS (A.)S.S.R. OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

